



YOSEMITE

NATIONAL PARK

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

— John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 1869

PLANNING UPDATE

Volume 22

July 2002

"In the weeks and months ahead, we will be asking for your thoughts and comments as we move forward with our slate of improvement projects."

Dear Yosemite Friends,

THE LONG ABSENCE OF the *Planning Update* is a direct reflection on how tremendously busy we have been here in Yosemite National Park. I hope this issue helps bring you up to date on some of the latest developments.

First, I'm pleased to announce that the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan* was recently held up in federal court as a valid management plan for protecting and enhancing the 81-miles of river that flow through Yosemite National Park. Thanks to your involvement, we were able to make a strong plan that adhered to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and stood up to the challenge in court.



Secondly, Congress directed us to move expeditiously to complete a number of projects in Yosemite National Park by the end of 2004. These projects will implement several key actions called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan* using money from Flood Recovery, the Fee Demonstration Program (see page 6), philanthropic donations, and other funds. Congress also requested that the National Park Service complete a campground feasibility study by December 2002 in order to identify where additional campsites could be located in Yosemite National Park.

Many of the projects we outlined for Congress will include opportunities for your participation. In the weeks and months ahead, we will be asking for your thoughts and comments as we move forward with our slate of improvement projects. I am confident that with your continued support, we can protect the park's unique natural and cultural treasures while preserving the Yosemite experience for future generations.

Sincerely,

David A. Mihalic
Park Superintendent

The people who care about Yosemite—both visitors and staff alike—are invited to engage in continuing conversations regarding Yosemite's future as improvement projects begin.



NPS Photo by Steve Thompson

Restoration to Natural Conditions

Work was completed last fall to remove nearly 2,700 tons of chunked-up asphalt, campsite markers, and concrete logs in the closed, flood-damaged portion of Lower Pines Campground. This project was the first step in the ecological restoration process called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*.

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The Planning Update is an occasional publication of the National Park Service, Office of the Superintendent, Yosemite National Park, P. O. Box 577, Yosemite, CA 95389.

Kristina Rylands edited this issue with contributions from David Siegenthaler, Martha Lee, Jerry Mitchell, Mike Wichmann, and Lynn Mattos.

Photos marked with an asterisk (*) were made possible in part from the National Park Foundation through the generous support of Kodak, Proud Partner of America's National Parks.

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Projects Move Forward

In the FY2002 Department of Interior Appropriations Bill signed into law by President Bush in November, Congress directed the National Park Service to move forward on a number of improvements to be completed in Yosemite National Park by the end of 2004. The National Park Service responded by submitting a list of priority projects that includes several actions called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*:

- Develop plans for ecological restoration of flood-damaged former campgrounds
- Improve the Lower Yosemite Fall area (see page 6)
- Remove the Cascades Diversion Dam and Happy Isles Gauging Station Bridge (see page 7)
- Expand the in-Valley shuttle system with cleaner-fuel vehicles and improve shuttle bus stops
- Replace flood-damaged Valley offices in El Portal
- Construct new campsites in Upper Pines Campground, along Tenaya Creek, and east of Curry Village

Additionally, the *Yosemite Valley Plan* called for the redesign of Yosemite Lodge in order to remove it from critical river areas, and refocus visitors' lodging from a motel-like experience to one more connected to and unique to the national park. The Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment actions submitted on the Congressional list will include associated natural resources restoration, rerouting of Northside Drive, and designing for the expansion of Camp 4 walk-in campground. This project is currently open for public scoping and the public is invited to submit written comments and concerns relating to the redesign of the Yosemite Lodge area.

The list to Congress also included redevelopment of Curry Village, including the creation of employee housing and new cabins with baths for visitors. The *Yosemite Valley Plan* called for these actions in order to relocate employee housing out of the floodplain and to improve visitor experience. Public scoping on a portion of this project is anticipated for later this summer, but comments and concerns will be accepted now.



NPS Photo by Matt Trask

Dilapidated Dam

The removal of the Cascades Diversion Dam from the Merced Wild and Scenic River is one of several *Yosemite Valley Plan* actions to be completed by the end of 2004 (also see page 7).

Public participation will also be encouraged as the following additional projects are initiated:

- **Parkwide Out-of-Valley Campground Study** — At the direction of Congress, the National Park Service is conducting an assessment of opportunities for expanding existing campgrounds or establishing new campgrounds outside of Yosemite Valley. This study is due to Congress by December 2002. Yosemite National Park is currently accepting comments and suggestions on pertinent issues and concerns related to campgrounds and camping experiences in the park.



NPS Photo by Kristina Rylands*

Campground Study

The public is invited to submit comments and concerns regarding the expansion of camping opportunities in Yosemite National Park.

- **Environmental Education**

Campus — In an effort to further its educational mission in Yosemite National Park, the National Park Service will be working with its nonprofit partner, Yosemite Institute, to create an environmental education campus. Since 1971, Yosemite Institute has provided week-long field science immersion programs to school children and adult groups. The expansion of Yosemite Institute's existing facility at Crane Flat is being considered. Currently, public comments are being accepted in preparation for an environmental impact statement.

- **The McCauley Ranch/Crocker Ridge Wilderness Suitability Assessment** —

By law, new additions of land to the National Park Service must be evaluated against certain criteria to determine if they qualify for Wilderness designation. The McCauley Ranch and Crocker Ridge areas were added to Yosemite National Park in 1984, but had not been previously evaluated by the criteria provided in the Wilderness Act and NPS Management Policies. Initial data collection has begun and the public comment period will be open until July 31.

- **Shuttle Bus Replacement** — Later this year, Yosemite National Park intends to request proposals to supply up to 19 new buses for the Yosemite Valley shuttle system. These buses, when delivered in late 2004, would replace the fleet of twelve 1986 diesel shuttle buses currently in use in Yosemite Valley. The new buses will be designed to operate over the gentle grades on Valley roads and to allow passengers to get on and off the bus easily at the many stops. Buses will use the best-available fuel and propulsion systems to minimize noise and air pollutant emissions, while providing sufficient capacity and cost-effective, reliable service.



YOU ARE INVITED

The National Park Service will be conducting regular open houses in Yosemite Valley in an effort to inform and involve the public in the many planning efforts and projects occurring throughout the park. All events will be held from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. in the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center's East Auditorium.

Mark Your Calendar for Summer Open Houses

Saturday	July 20	Wednesday	August 21
Wednesday	July 24	Saturday	September 21

The Value of the Public Voice

THROUGHOUT THE RECENT planning efforts, Yosemite National Park planning teams have come to understand one thing very clearly: public participation strengthens the planning process. The people who care about Yosemite—both visitors and staff alike—are invited to engage in continuing conversations regarding Yosemite's future as improvement projects begin. Your perspective and voice are unique and would be valuable contributions in helping the National Park Service produce better planning documents. Below is a guide to the types of comments that are most useful:

Scoping. Scoping comments are made in the early stages of a planning process. During project scoping, planning teams need to develop the range of issues and alternatives to be addressed. The most useful scoping comments consider the following:

- The necessity of the project
- Alternative approaches and ideas for accomplishing project goals
- The range of environmental and socioeconomic issues that need to be considered
- Other potential projects that might affect or be affected by this project
- Information that needs to be considered and why
- Information on how you use the park and how particular projects would affect that use

Draft Documents. When an environmental assessment or draft environmental impact statement is released, the public is asked to assess the adequacy of the document in disclosing and evaluating a project's effects on the environment. At this stage, the more specific the comment is, the better. For example:

- Discuss a particular project element or alternative
- Identify incomplete or incorrect information
- Offer reasons why a particular alternative or plan element would or would not work
- Offer a reasonable new plan element or alternative that could help accomplish the stated goals
- Point out discrepancies between legal mandates and project proposals
- Point out deficiencies in the environmental analysis
- Provide information on how you use the park and how particular proposals would affect that use

General Comments. Even outside of a formal planning process, park staff would like to hear your thoughts and ideas relating to planning and management issues affecting Yosemite National Park. *See back panel for details on where to send comments.*



NPS Photo by Caroline Deppe

The Natural Role of Fire

SINCE 1968, the National Park Service has recognized the essential role fire plays as a natural process in ecosystems. Since 1970, Yosemite National Park has had several fire management plans in an attempt to restore fire to its necessary role.

The restoration of fire to its natural role in park ecosystems is one of the highest natural resource management priorities of Yosemite National Park. All major forest and chaparral plant communities in Yosemite have evolved under the influences of fire, and many plants have developed adaptations to a regime of frequently occurring fires—some plants are even dependent upon fire for successful reproduction. Some ecosystems in Yosemite National Park have been harmed by years of fire suppression activities.

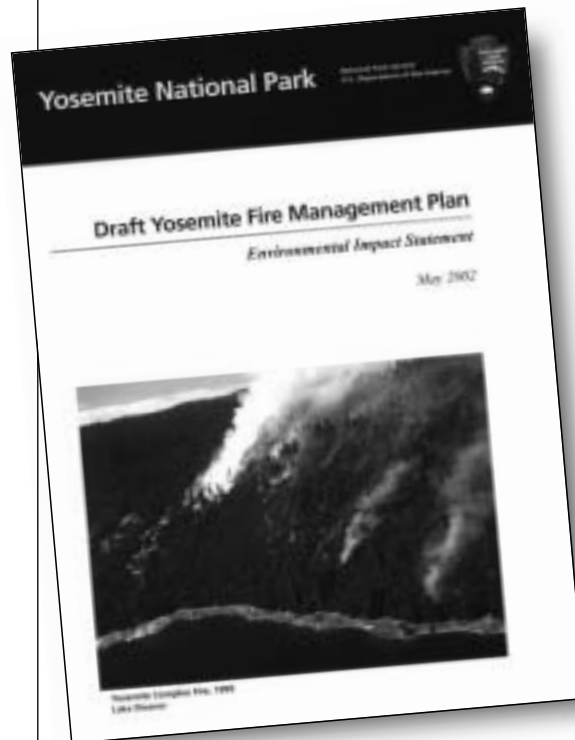


NPS Photo by Bruce Berry

Wildland Fire

It is estimated that 95% of fires in Yosemite are caused by lightning. These *wildland fires* are strictly monitored and would continue to be managed under all of the *Draft Yosemite Fire Management Plan* alternatives.

Draft Yosemite Fire Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement



The Draft Yosemite Fire Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement has been released to the public and the official 60-day public comment period is underway. This document updates the existing 12-year-old Fire Management Plan and complies with the National Fire Policy. The plan proposes four alternatives for managing wildland and prescribed

fire. The overarching goal of the plan is to improve the park's ability to restore areas to natural conditions while protecting life and property in developed areas and in locations with high visitor use.

ALTERNATIVE A—NO ACTION

Under the No Action Alternative, the current fire management programs and activity level would continue. This alternative would use the strategies of the existing *Fire Management Plan*, including prescribed fire, managed wildland fire (such as those caused by lightning), fire suppression, and hand cutting followed by pile burning and prescribed fire. Currently, ecosystem restoration goals and protection of developed areas are not accomplished at this level.

ALTERNATIVE B—AGGRESSIVE ACTION

Under Alternative B, more aggressive mechanical techniques would be used to reduce the buildup of fuels in and near developed areas (less than 1% of the park's acreage), while accomplishing fire-related ecosystem restoration goals. Thinning and prescribed burning would be increased over existing levels and lightning fires would be allowed to burn where practicable. Fire would be the primary tool for reducing the buildup of fuels.



NPS Photo

Returning Fire to an Ecosystem

Yosemite fire crews have safely conducted 191 prescribed burns since 1970.

would be used in developed areas if needed, while prescribed fire and passive reduction techniques would be used to achieve ecosystem restoration goals in other areas. Managed wildland fire would be used as in Alternative B.

COMMENT PERIOD

The official public comment period for the *Draft Yosemite Fire Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* is currently open and will close on August 27, 2002. A series of public meetings is scheduled in Yosemite National Park, Oakhurst, Mariposa, Sonora, and Mammoth Lakes (see sidebar). The public is invited to review and comment on the plan's alternatives. These comments will be read by the planning team and may help guide the development of the *Final Yosemite Fire Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*, anticipated for release in spring 2003.

To submit a comment or request a copy of the *Draft Yosemite Fire Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*, contact the park (see back panel).



ALTERNATIVE C—PASSIVE ACTION

Under the Passive Action Alternative, efforts would be made to decrease fuel buildup in developed areas of the park while accomplishing fire-related ecosystem restoration goals, but would be done so over a longer period of time using lighter mechanical means. Prescribed burning would be increased over existing levels, but not as much as under Alternative B. Managed wildland fire would be used as in Alternative B.

ALTERNATIVE D—MULTIPLE ACTION (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative D proposes a combination of aggressive and passive fuel reduction techniques in order to quickly and effectively achieve protection, fuel reduction, and ecosystem restoration goals. Under this alternative, aggressive treatment strategies



NPS Photo

Prescribed Fire

Prescribed fires are ignited under approved conditions by qualified park staff to protect developed areas (like Yosemite Valley and Wawona) and in other areas with unnaturally high amounts of woody debris.

DRAFT YOSEMITE FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN

IMPORTANT DATES

NPS Open Houses & Field Trips

Saturday, July 20

2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Yosemite Valley Visitor Center
East Auditorium

3:30 p.m. Field Trip

Wednesday, July 24

2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Yosemite Valley Visitor Center
East Auditorium

3:30 p.m. Field Trip

Public Meeting Schedule

Thursday, July 25

3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Mammoth Lakes
Mammoth Lakes High School
Multipurpose Room
365 Sierra Park Road

Monday, July 29

3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Sonora
Tuolumne County Library
Meeting Room
480 Greenley Road

Tuesday, July 30

3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Oakhurst
Oakhurst Community Center
Pavilion
39800 Road 425B

Wednesday, July 31

3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Mariposa
Mariposa Senior Activity Center
5246 Spriggs Lane

**Public Comment Period Ends
August 27, 2002**

Fees Directly Support Projects in Yosemite

TO PROVIDE MUCH-NEEDED assistance to federal agencies, including the National Park Service, Congress took a bold step in 1996 and authorized the Recreational Fee Demonstration (Fee Demo) Program. Prior to the Fee Demo Program, fees—such as entrance fees—collected at sites in the National Park System were returned to the U.S. Treasury and were not available to directly support park projects.

Under the Fee Demo Program, these fees are now retained by the National Park Service. Much of this funding is earmarked for backlogged maintenance projects, improved visitor services, and protection of the park's natural and cultural resources. 80% of fees are retained in the collecting park and 20% are shared with parks that do not collect fees.

In addition to providing admission into Yosemite, entrance fees directly support projects in the park as well as other sites in the National Park System. When you visit a Fee Demo site, you help the National Park Service preserve and protect our nation's heritage for future generations.



Projects completed in Yosemite National Park, thanks to the Fee Demo Program:

- Renovation of the Valley Visitor Center's West Auditorium Theater
- Repair of sections of sewer line that services Yosemite Valley

Ongoing projects include:

- Stabilizing historic backcountry cabins at Merced Lake, Ostrander Lake, and Miguel Meadows
- Replacing picnic tables, fire rings, and signs in out-of-Valley campgrounds

Future projects include:

- Refurbishing roads, trails, and utilities throughout the park
- Improving the shuttle buses and bus service in Yosemite Valley

Latest Developments

YOSEMITE VALLEY PLAN

As announced in a previous *Planning Update*, the National Park Service is working on a summary document, to be called the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. It will provide a description of the actions selected for implementation and the additional recommendations recorded as part of the Record of Decision. Like the summary document for the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan*, the *Yosemite Valley Plan* will serve as a useable reference for park staff and interested members of the public. This document is now anticipated for release by the end of 2002.

LOWER YOSEMITE FALL PROJECT

An environmental assessment was completed last winter to analyze the impacts of actions not previously detailed in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. A Finding of No Significant Impact was signed by the National Park Service's Western Regional Director on May 16, 2002. National Park Service trail crews began reconstruction of the eastern channel trail this summer and work on the project will continue through 2005. This project is being completed in partnership with The Yosemite Fund.

COOK'S MEADOW RESTORATION

The recent completion of the boardwalk that replaced an asphalt trail through Cook's Meadow was the finishing touch in the 4-year restoration project. Old roadbeds were removed and natural water flows restored to improve the health of the meadow. Completed in partnership with The Yosemite Fund and corporate sponsors, Cook's Meadow restoration was recently hailed by Don Murphy, Deputy Director of the National Park Service as "an excellent example of an effective collaboration between public and private entities."



NPS Photo by Mary Beth Shenton*

What's Next for Cook's Meadow?

National Park Service resource specialists will continue to monitor the condition of Cook's Meadow. Information gathered will be valuable for future meadow and wetland restoration efforts in Yosemite.

HAPPY ISLES GAUGING STATION BRIDGE REMOVAL

The pedestrian bridge adjacent to the Nature Center at Happy Isles was removed from the Merced River late last fall. The site has since been restored and a viewing platform is now situated on the former bridge abutment along the east side of the river. This pedestrian bridge was closed in 1997 due to damage sustained during the 1997 flood.



NPS Photo

BEFORE Removal



NPS Photo

DURING Removal

The bridge was removed using a controlled demolition method, which included separating the structure into liftable segments. Temporary floating tubs were installed beneath the bridge to prevent debris from falling into the river.

This portion of the Merced Wild and Scenic River is now returned to a more natural condition and its free-flowing nature has been enhanced.



NPS Photo by Kristina Rylands*

AFTER Removal

CASCADES DIVERSION DAM REMOVAL

Removal of the dilapidated Cascades Diversion Dam is scheduled for the fall of 2003, after completion of an environmental assessment. This action was called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan* in order to restore the natural free-flowing condition of the Merced Wild and Scenic River. Initial planning on this project began in April 2001, but was postponed awaiting the outcome of litigation involving the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan*. Removal of the dam is necessary for several reasons. It currently serves as an impoundment on a Wild and Scenic River. In its present deteriorated condition, it also represents a public health and safety hazard due to potential uncontrolled collapse. Additionally, during periods of average to low water flow, the dilapidated wooden structure of the dam is exposed, creating a visual intrusion on an otherwise popular scenic location (see photo on page 2).



PLANS STILL AVAILABLE

Copies of both the *Final Yosemite Valley Plan/Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* and the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan* are still available in hard copy or on CD-ROM and can be obtained by contacting the park (see back panel). These documents can also be viewed online at:

www.nps.gov/yose/planning

Planning documents
and project details can
be found online. Visit:

www.nps.gov/yose/planning



NPS Photo by Kristina Rylands*

You Can Participate!

The park's project teams welcome your written comments on any of the current park planning efforts. In your letter, be sure to include the name of the project to which your comment is directed. You are also welcome at any time to submit general comments regarding the management of Yosemite National Park.

Mail to: Superintendent
Attn: [Name of project, if applicable]
National Park Service
P. O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389

Fax to: 209/379-1294

Email to: YOSE_Planning@nps.gov

The status of ongoing projects will be periodically updated online at the Yosemite planning web site:

www.nps.gov/yose/planning



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Thanks for your help!